

## BULLYING INFORMATION

**Bullying isn't something that just happens in school playgrounds. It happens all too often in workplaces, making the daily lives of many workers intolerable.**

Results from various Australian polls show that around 50% of workers have been bullied, threatened, harassed or abused at work.

Bullying can be a threat to physical well being or psychologically damaging and it can make life at work a misery. It can result in actual physical injury or health problems due to stress. Not only is it a health and safety issue, but it also affects the productivity and effectiveness of organisations. It is a serious problem.

### WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is the misuse of the 'power' of an individual or group derived from their position, seniority, physical attributes, gender, race or nationality against other people. The following types of behaviour, when repeated or occurring as part of a pattern of behaviour would be considered bullying:

- Verbal abuse
- Excluding or isolating employees
- Psychological harassment
- Assigning meaningless tasks unrelated to the job
- Giving employees impossible assignments
- Deliberately changing work rosters to inconvenience particular employees
- Deliberately withholding information that is vital for effective work performance

**PHYSICAL ATTACK** – means the direct or indirect application of force by a person to the body, or to clothing or equipment worn by, another person, where that application creates a risk to health and safety.

**THREAT** – means a statement or behaviour that causes a person to believe they are in danger of being physically attacked.

**UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR** – means behaviour that a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would expect to victimise, humiliate, undermine or threaten another person. It includes actions of individuals or a group of employees, and may involve using a system of work as a means of victimising, humiliating, undermining or threatening an Employee or a group of Employees.

**NB:** The repeated nature of the behaviour refers to persistence and not the specific form the behaviour takes. It includes situations in which a pattern of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour can be established.

**VICTIMISATION** - means unfair treatment connected to a complaint of discrimination or harassment.

**WORKPLACE VIOLENCE** - means any incident where an employee is physically attacked or threatened in the workplace.

Workplace violence includes, but is not limited to the following:

- threats of violence or personal injury
- objects being thrown at an employee
- pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, grabbing, biting, spitting
- attacks with any type of weapon
- criminal assault
- sexual assault.

This list is not exhaustive, and that other factors which may contribute to the risk of bullying include:

- Organisational change
- Workforce characteristics
- Workplace relationships
- Work systems

### How the ASU can help

The ASU provides advice and information to members regarding workplace rights and obligations. ASU members can contact their State ASU office for more information. If required the ASU provides members with individual representation.

To obtain the contact details of your local ASU Branch visit the ASU national website [www.asu.asn.au](http://www.asu.asn.au) or contact the JSA National Project Coordinator on (03) 9342 1400 or [help@employmentservicesunion.org.au](mailto:help@employmentservicesunion.org.au)

[www.employmentservicesunion.org.au](http://www.employmentservicesunion.org.au)



## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF BULLYING?

### For the worker

Stress and ill health can become part of the daily life of those being bullied. Symptoms can include:

- anxiety
- headaches
- nausea
- sleeplessness
- skin rashes
- irritable bowel syndrome
- high blood pressure
- tearfulness
- loss of self confidence
- various illnesses of the organs, such as kidneys
- thoughts of suicide
- reliance on unhealthy 'stress relievers' such as alcohol or drugs

### For the boss

Bullying is recognised as a major cause of stress in the workplace and by law, stress must be dealt with in the same way as any other health and safety hazard. Employers who fail to tackle bullying can pay a high price:

- lost time - because staff are affected by stress and ill health
- lost incentive - because morale is low
- reduced work output & quality of service
- lost resources - because people who are trained and experienced leave the organisation
- adverse media attention

## WHO IS AT RISK?

Anyone can be bullied. Casual employees, part-time workers and those employed on individual contracts or Australian Workplace Agreements are generally more vulnerable to bullying because they are less likely to complain.

Fellow workers, supervisors or managers can carry out bullying. Independent research carried out by the Staffordshire University in the UK (which surveyed many hundreds of workers), indicates that in the vast majority of cases, bullying is carried out by a person in authority.